

Religion in a Changing Workplace

By Elaine Howard Ecklund, Denise Daniels, and Christopher P. Scheitle, Oxford University Press, 2024, 201 pages, \$24.95

REVIEWED BY JASON M. STANSBURY
Calvin University

Religion in a Changing Workplace reports two very large multi-method empirical studies of religious expression, religious experience, religious discrimination, and religious accommodation in the American workplace, and makes a case for faith-friendly workplaces that are more engaging for their employees.

The book addresses a problem familiar to many Christians: While faith provides a basis for calling, connecting, coping, and ethics that are central to the identities of many people, workplace managers or colleagues often fear that religious expression can stoke interpersonal conflict, exclude some employees from cooperation, or incur legal liability. They are therefore often ambivalent about religious expression at work and may actively discourage it. *Religion in a Changing Workplace* explains that ambivalence, details ways that religion affects workplace behavior, and describes the phenomenon of religious discrimination and best practices in the accommodation of religion in the workplace. It closes with recommendations for managers who would like to make their workplaces “faith friendly,” thereby contributing to employee engagement and commitment. For readers interested in biblical integration in business, this book provides important insight into the ways that integration is actually practiced by a wide variety of businesspeople and into possibilities for greater integration.

A work of descriptive social science with prescriptive management implications, *Religion in a Changing Workplace* is not a theological work. Instead, it bases its insights upon a careful engagement with existing literature, and upon a pair of sociological studies carefully detailed in five appendices: the 2018 Faith at Work Study, comprised of a detailed survey of 13,270 completed responses drawn from the Gallup Panel of adults representative of the population in the United States, and follow-up interviews with 205 survey respondents plus 29 Christian religious leaders; and the 2021 Pandemic, Faith, and Work Study,

comprised of a detailed survey of 2,486 completed responses drawn from the Gallup Panel of adults in the United States, and completed follow-up interviews with 51 survey respondents. Both studies included significant contingents of Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and “No Religion” respondents. The studies reported in this book are impressive in their scope and rigor, and provide a credibly representative and detailed picture of religion in the American workplace.

The characterization of the forms of religious behavior in the workplace found in chapters 3-6 is a valuable contribution. Those four chapters align with the fourfold faith-integration typology of “ethics, expression, experience, and enrichment” first elaborated in David Miller’s 2007 book *God at Work*, and then in subsequent survey research (e.g., Miller et al., 2019; Zhou & Lee, 2023). Importantly, this book identifies systematic differences in the “who” in each category: Each faith-integration mode is enacted differently, depending on who is doing the enacting. Some representative findings include that Evangelical Protestants, for instance, tend to be more expressive of their faith, more likely to experience their work as a calling, and more likely to morally object to some workplace expectations than Catholic, Other Protestant, and Other Christian respondents. Workers in the “education, training, or library,” “caretaking,” and “community / social services” fields were three times as likely to see their work as a spiritual calling as those in manufacturing, and twice as likely as those in “business or finance,” or “retail or sales.” Thirty-six percent of Black respondents agreed that they “feel motivated to talk about [their] faith or spirituality with people at work,” compared with only 26% of White and 18% of Asian respondents. These provide a valuable sense of the faith integration practices of large portions of the American workforce that are often ignored by the white and white-collar focus of the “Faith at Work” movement (Lynn, 2023).

Each of those chapters also provides valuable insights into the “how” of each form of faith integration and some key outcomes. Expression may take the form of talking about one’s faith at work, or of praying by oneself or with others at work, or of displaying symbols of one’s faith at work; it may be evangelistic, or it may pertain mostly to claiming one’s own identity. Workers who strongly agree that they display their faith at work are more likely to also strongly agree that they are very satisfied with their jobs, and those who strongly agree that they are comfortable talking about their faith at work are also likely to strongly agree that they feel a strong sense of commitment to their organizations. One’s sense of calling may be situated along a foursquare matrix of two dimensions: the intrinsic-versus-extrinsic meaning of the work and the locus of the people that one’s work serves (ranging from those involved in the work, like coworkers, to those uninvolved in it, like dependent family members). While each quadrant of that matrix identifies the meaning of one’s work differently, all bolster motivation and aid in coping with stress. Religion also helps workers to cope with workplace stress by providing comfort, perspective, and motivation to persevere, and sometimes by providing a community of social support. Religion also provides ethical perspectives that emphasize care, integrity, and purity— typically at the individual level— and may motivate workers to object to workplace behaviors that violate their moral convictions, to support victims of or objectors to those behaviors, and sometimes to leave an organization rather than submit to continued violations of conscience.

The discussion of leadership ambivalence about faith at work, religious discrimination, accommodations, and best practices in forging faith-friendly practices in chapters 2, and 7, 8, and 10 is also a worthwhile contribution. Many treatments of faith at work are either sympathetic or skeptical, but *Religion in a Changing Workplace* takes a scientific and unbiased view, documenting the discrimination experienced not only by religious minorities but also by the Christians who are sometimes but not always a majority in American workplaces. Such experiences are common, reported by as few as 22% of Catholics and as many as 38% of Evangelicals, 55% of Jews, and 65% of Muslims. Such experiences also correlate with lower job satisfaction and higher stress-induced exhaustion (i.e., “burnout”). Religious accommodations that bolster inclusion and reduce experiences of discrimination are often unknown to workers, with only 41% of very religious survey

respondents and 25% of “not-at-all religious” respondents agreeing that they know what religious accommodations their own organizations offered; the authors remarked that many interviewees did not even realize that religious discrimination is typically illegal. The studies reported in this book did not examine whether respondents sought accommodations or other redress. However, policies and management role-modeling can clarify acceptable and unacceptable religious speech, time off for observance of religious holidays, or manifestations of religious practices like symbols, prayers, and celebrations. These reduce the tension of vague expectations, create norms of affirmed religious behavior, and enhance coping with experiences of discrimination, particularly for religious minorities, which include Evangelical Christians in some geographies.

Finally, there is a chapter on religion and work-family conflict (WFC). Perceptions of WFC did not differ between study participants who were more religious and less religious, nor did they differ between adherents of different religious traditions. Instead, perceptions of WFC differed between women and men, between respondents who were married and not, and between respondents who had children at home and did not. Religion contributed to the experience of WFC indirectly, as it correlated with higher likelihoods of marriage and of having children at home as well as with expectations that women will take primary responsibility for caregiving and household work.

Religion in a Changing Workplace is remarkably readable for a report of original sociological research. It is concise, at only 153 pages excluding appendices and references. It is free of jargon, relying on straightforward descriptive statistics and bar charts while eschewing the discussions of statistical significance and measures of central tendency that are familiar to many social scientists, and relegating explanations of the survey and interview methods, data sources, and response rates to the appendices. It includes numerous apt but concise quotations from interview participants to illustrate its qualitative points. Graduate students and faculty in the social sciences may desire a more technical explanation of methods and findings, and should also consult findings from these studies published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Frost et al., 2023).

Altogether, *Religion in a Changing Workplace* is a methodologically-rigorous, eminently readable, and theoretically meaningful contribution to the social science of faith integration. I highly recommend *Religion in a Changing Workplace* for Christian business scholars who are interested in understanding predictors, moderators,

and outcomes of faith integration in the workplace. At faith-based institutions in particular, chapters 3-6 could provide mission-aligned readings for an upper-division or graduate class on organizational behavior, to describe ways that workers may experience the intersection of faith and work, and chapter 6 in particular could also be excerpted for an upper-division or graduate business class on business ethics, to describe common influences of religion upon workplace ethical behavior. I also highly recommend *Religion in a Changing Workplace* for business scholars and businesspeople who are interested in religious diversity, discrimination, and accommodation in the workplace, whether from the standpoint of individuals facing such discrimination or of managers striving to prevent it. At faith-based institutions in particular, chapters 2, 7, 8, and 10 could provide mission-aligned readings for an upper-division or graduate business class on human resources to describe religious discrimination and accommodations. At faith-based institutions in particular, chapter 9 could also be a mission-aligned way to broach the topic of WFC in organizational behavior or human resources courses by describing the ways it is experienced differently by women and men and by people whose faith traditions and contexts frame and motivate their choices and priorities.

REFERENCES

- Frost, J., Scheitle, C. P., Ecklund, E. H., & Daniels, D. (2023). The role of religion and religious tradition in predicting individuals' expressions of faith in the workplace. *Religions, 14*(7), 920. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070920>
- Lynn, A. (2023). *Saving the Protestant ethic: Creative class evangelicalism and the crisis of work*. Oxford University Press.
- Miller, D. A. (2007). *God at work: The history and promise of the faith at work movement*. Oxford University Press.
- Miller, D. A., Ewest, T., & Neubert, M. J. (2019). Development of the integration profile (TIP) faith and work integration scale. *Journal of Business Ethics, 159*, 455-471. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3773-2>
- Zhou, S., & Lee, P. (2023). Spirituality in the context of teams and organizations: An investigation of boundary conditions using The Integration Profile workplace spirituality measure. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion, 20*(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.51327/AELL2802>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jason Stansbury holds the James and Judith Chambery Chair for the Study of Ethics in Business at Calvin University. Jason works to convene Christian scholars in business, in business ethics, and in moral theology to explore and develop those resources and applications. A former executive

director of the Society for Business Ethics, Jason also chairs the Jansma Series on Faith and Business, which convenes triennial symposia at the Calvin University School of Business on theological concepts in business ethics. He is a co-editor of the *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics*. His PhD is in organization studies from Vanderbilt University.